History of Gajapati by Its Won Historian

A prescriptive History

Introduction

The antiquity of the land hitherto remains unknown to the population living beyond the confines of the district and its unthinkable past grandeur and cultural richness still remains buried under mysteries and legends even after 78 years of liberation from the bondge of the British East India Company. It is true that we as yet have very little knowledge about the past of the region and have a few credible sources; But they too have nothing solid to corroborate our assumptions. Historically, this terminology, Gajapati, refers to the place where powerful war elephants lived in bulk in ancient times, which was the typical species of elephant of the region. They could only be seen in this part of the subcontinent (Lokhari forest near Chandragiri in the Gajapati district). Thus, the land came to be known as 'Gajapati' and the rulers ruled over the land were called 'Gajapatis' (The Lord of Elephant). The land lies to the southern side of the Ganjam district about 150 km away from the Berhampur town to the headquarter of the district (Paralakhemundi). The region is inhabited by a significant number of people belonging to various ethnic groups, such as Sauras, Lanjia Sauras and Sabaras. They have very distinct accent from place to place and their clothing style is remarkably unique in several respects. On festival occasions, they dress as the deities to whom they are devoted, wearing a saaree and holding a tiny dagger in their hand, and they also adorn themselves with all the ornaments with which the deity is embellished. The headquarter of the district is located at Paralakhemundi, one of the estates (zamidaris) owned by Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati. The district is situated to the south side of the Ganjam district, on its west situated the district of Rayagada, on its north lies the Kandhamal district and its southern periphery touches the border of the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Definition of History

The definition of history has long been a subject of sustained controversy among historians since antiquity. Interpretations of history often vary according to individual perspectives, giving rise to ongoing criticism and debate regarding its true nature. Those outside the discipline may perceive history as nothing more than a chronicle of past events or actions. Broadly speaking, however, history does not encompass every occurrence in the past; rather, it is concerned with events and actions of demonstrable significance-those grounded on substantial evidence and capable of leaving a lasting legacy for subsequent generations.

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Figure 1

The Political map of Gajapati district above shows the tahasils of the district

Political History and Dismemberment

This district is much younger than my grandmother. Before its formal bifurcation on October 2,1992. It had been an integral part of the Ganjam district, which was under the Madras presidency during colonial India. There was no king during its partition, Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati of the Gajapati dynasty (ancient Eastern Ganga Dynasty was the last descendent of the lineage to rule over Paralakhemundi estate and

with his last breath on 25 may, 1974 the monarchical rule came to an absolute end in the princely state. Later it was substituted with democracy. The princely states eventually became a separate entity or a district of United Orissa in 1936. The district Gajapati was named after the Raja to commemorate him.

A Glance at Maharaja

One of the most influential figures in Modern Orissa history is the parala maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati Narayana Deo, a scion of the Gajapati Dynasty, who was the first prime minister of the independent Orissa, although for a short term. His contribution to the creation of a separate Orissa province is beyond comparison. He exerted much of his efforts in the cause of nationalism and once he journeyed to London, the seat of British capital, to participate in one of the round table conferences 1930-31). He even met the Viceroy of India, Lord Willingdon, and persuaded him for the amalgamation of all the scattered pieces of the land where Oriya was spoken. He was deeply concerned about the disintegration of the Oriya speaking tracks which were under different presidencies. Therefore, he tirelessly attempted to recollect all those amputated organs of the land together and to form a full-fledged province. His realisation became true on the 1st April,1936 of what he dreamt much earlier in the past. Thus, he is regarded as one of the founding fathers of the United Province of Orissa.

F- ll The image above depicts M.K.C.G. with Britishers at Brindavan palace

People

People are very kind and welcoming here. They have a slightly dark complexion and vary in stature. They can instantly get along with someone- even with a stranger- and they are happy to help anyone in need. Women are truly diligent and insanely obsessed with their daily chores or work. They are not lethargic and often spend their time working in the fields. Men are mentally mature and physically robust. There is a reciprocal trust between the communities of the land.

Economy

Agriculture has formed a chief economic base of people since the time immemorial. The earliest evidence of agriculture is reported from the North-Western frontier provinces, particularly from a place called Mehergarh where archeologists discovered the remains of rice husk that revealed many hidden facts about the genesis of agriculture during the Neolithic period, the period of new change in human mind. People of this particular region virtually rely on agriculture for survival. They love to live in secluded places far from restless urban life. They produce many species of crops and herbs to feed themselves and also practice animal husbandry to balance their economy. The rotation of crops is also practiced by them to retain the fertility of soil. Therefore, besides mere rice, they also cultivate other kinds of vegetables and fruits depending on the seasonal climate. Crops are generally produced two times a year; the only problem that the cultivators face during cultivation being the potential scarcity of water, which could cause crop failure. The principal crop of the region, which is predominantly yielded by people, is rice; in fact it is the prominent diet of the people of this region. Apart from rice, other crops include ragi, wild legumes, mustard seeds (small seeds from the Brassica plant family) and maize etc. They use various kinds of agricultural apparatus and gears for executing cultivation; the most common being sickle to harvest crops.

Society

The society is highly heterogeneous. People are staunch supporters of the social hierarchical system. And also superstitious and spiritual in nature. The society is divided into various sections. Although there are no definitely established number of classes, we generally divide the society into three major categories according to their occupations and professions. Following is the prevalent social hierarchy of the land (1) wealthy in which include factory owners, landlords and businessmen; (2) Middle Class

or the second category is formed by the doctors, engineers, teachers and other government officials and (3) the bottom or the third strata of the society is assigned to the people mostly belonging to the agricultural backgrounds and daily wagers. According to Marxist historians in a society there are only two classes i.e. the Haves (the capitalist class) and the Havenots (the commoners), who are divided by the financial rift. The major ills of the society are racial discrimination, ignorance and poverty which pushes the community miles behind from other competitive groups; The only remedy to cure all these chronic social diseases is education, which could create awareness among the people. A renowned statesman and freedom fighter, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who fought for the backward classes (Dalits), once remarked that "Life should be great rather than long". A man can be great by his good deeds and achievements; the only means to attain such height of dignity is education, as I said earlier, So I advise the emerging generations in the following words "Be educated, be curious, and be ready to avail opportunities". The social stratification of the land is demonstrated through the triangular chart provided under.

Figure Ill

Social Starification of the land

Portends

All societies have certain omens or portends, a bad sign, that people believe to be a harbinger of an impending calamitous event. People of this realm regard some birds as manifestations of future trouble. Greater Coucal or Pheasant, which they call it in their native tongue "Kumbatua", is a classic instance of a portend that the people believe to be a troublesome sign. The bird is a member of the cuckoo family and commonly found in India; It has a glossy black body, long tail and chest-nut brown wings. Its ruby red eyes give it a demonic look. Therefore, people regard it as a warning sign of future trouble.

Owls are another omen that is believed to be an indicator of danger. People often panic due to its scary appearance and the sound that it produces make people feel scared.

Comparison between City Life and Village Life

The two lives are very different from each other in characteristics. A man can live in either one. Village Life is peaceful, comfortable, simple and full of activities whereas the urban life is rather uncomfortable, restless and people are selfish, arrogant and look down upon people inferior to them in social status. Both lives have certain deficiencies which we shall discuss subsequently.

The atmosphere in cities is polluted due to the exhaust fumes from vehicle and emissions from industries. Rivers that flows through industrial jungles are contaminated by the waste that is discharged into them. This harms aquatic life and can become a serious threat to reef ecosystems. In cities, cows- whom we regard as sacred beasts- end up living like stray dogs. They wander through the streets, eat garbage and live a miserable life. Sadly, some imbecile city residents even poison them by offering their leftovers.

Caste System

A complex form of the caste system can be noticed here. This evil practice that the people have inherited from their remote predecessors is widely followed by the majority of conservative and orthodox people who are arrogant of their supreme birth. If we

closely look at the caste system of the land, we may encounter four main categories such as S.T.,S C., O.B.C. and General- the modern categorization of castes- as elsewhere. The region is crowded by the people belonging to the first two sections, S.T. and S.C., for whom we generally use the term "Aadivasi". The word 'Aadivasi' is derived from the two archaic Sanskrit terms "Aadi" meaning old or ancient and ' vasi' meaning people. So the term 'Aadibasi' means here "The old people" or "the ancient tribes". The S.T. and S.C. section include people belonging to the social groups like Sauras, Lanjia Sauras and Sabaras. Be it noted that these two sections of people form the half of the demographic rate in the region from the remaining categories. Another tribal group namely Khonds also can be found scattered throughout the land. There is a minority group in the realm; In Kandomal district, however, this community live in substantial numbers. They speak Kui language and use Oriya script for writing.

Marriage

Marriage is the union of two souls for eternity. After spending the preliminary phase of his life learning and exploring knowledge in the Banprasth Ashrama, A man enters the next part of his life called 'Gruhasth Ashrama' (household life). He has to perform certain obligations within this interval called "Pitruruna", (ancestral debt). He must marry a woman, have children, take care of them and protect them from the evil eye. Although Inter-caste marriage is traditionally prohibited in the society, the younger generation often violates this traditional code of marriage. Marriage is a grand event for the people of the land. Families of the bride and groom send invitations to all their relatives, both near and far, to come and bless the couple. The event lasts for at least three to four days. The bride's father has to give a lavish amount of money and other valuable items, along with his daughter to the groom's family. The whole village assembles at a place and discusses the agenda of the event.

During the Vedic period, there were eleven types of marriage prevailing in the society. (Yet to add details)

Dowry System

The dowry system is a deep-rooted feature of Indian society. People have been practicing it since ancient times. It is another evil that has polluted our social atmosphere, which needs to be eradicated altogether. Although the Indian parliament officially abolished the dowry system through the enactment of the Dowry Prohibition

Act to prevent dowry related atrocities within societies in post colonial India (1961). It is still widely practiced by many. The act formally came into force on 1 July 1961. Under this act, the taking and giving of any kind of valuable items including money, ornaments and lands, shall constitute a criminal offence. Any person who breaches it may be liable to imprisonment for a term of not less than five years and a fine that can exceed 15000 rupees (D.P.A.- 1961). The Hindu has recorded 5,464 dowry related crimes, which have been reported across the state since 2025 (The Hindu). This practice often exhausts all savings of the bride's father and leaves the family in debt. Therefore, in order to avoid potential debts and mortgages in the days to come, some parents marry their teenagers off before they come of age. (Yet to add details)

Position of Women

Indian society has undermined women since ancient times. Before discussing the position of women in the realm, we should first take a glance at our old Indian society and the status of women within it. Therefore, we have to travel deep in the past in time. During the Rig Vedic period there was devoid of any complex practices and women held revered positions within societies. It is evident from some renowned figures whose names frequently appear in some ancient texts (Vedas). Some women scholars who lived during the Early Vedic period were Gargi, Apala, Viswambara and Lopamudra; They even composed some Vedic hymns and equally participated with men in decision-making. But in the subsequent phase of the Vedic Age, which we alternatively call the Later Vedic Age, society became extremely rigid and many evil practices crept into the society, such as Sati, Parada System or (Burqa), Dowry system, Caste System, Child marriage etc. Women lost their earlier right to participate in decision-making and were not allowed to gain knowledge. They could not act independently and had to live within the four walls. Their reputation was curtailed to the lowest and had to hold a subordinate position within a family. People considered them a burden on the family and wanted to marry them off early. Wearing Burqa or Dupatta was a must-do thing for a woman during the Later Vedic Age. The practice of sati became the order of those days. In the early ages, the sati was voluntarily practiced by a widow after the death of her husband in a perception that she had no more satisfactory options to live without her soul mate, who departed for the next world. But later it was frequented using coercion. The Sati was symbolised as a conduct of piety and practiced by a widow to keep her chastity stainless forever.

Another social evil that engulfed the then society was Johar. It is similar to Sati in some respects. It was usually performed by royal class women (warriors) during a national crisis to escape any sort of maltreatment by their foes. We can come across some instances of Johar from the Medieval age. Among them, the episode of Padmavat is the most celebrated. Queen Padmini- the princess of Ceylon and the wife or queen of Rana Ratan Singh of the Guhila dynasty- was known for her extraordinary beauty. She performed Johar after the collapse of the kingdom. Alauddin Khilji, the then sultan of Delhi drowned on her because of her stunningness and became adamant to take her for his Harem, a separate compartment within the sultan's palace for the queens and other illegitimate wives of the sultan. Another such instance occurred during the early medieval times when the Arabs stormed the North-Western door of the subcontinent. During the Arab invasion, Sind was ruled by Dahir, who failed to check the Muslim inroad into his kingdom. As a result of his negligence, he was defeated by the Mahammadans. This invasion took place in 712 A.D. After the death of Dahir fighting against his foes, his queen Ranibai performed Johar by jumping into a large fire altar to escape the ill-treatment of the infields.

Position of women with special reference to Gajapati district

Some uncivilized people of the remote villages of the realm are totally indifferent toward empowerment of women as elsewhere. They think that they are mere machines to produce children and are not allowed to go to school and gain knowledge like boys. Child marriage was widely practiced during the 90s in the society. The people were extremely obsessed with this evil practice. On this ground, Manu, the descendent of lord Brahma (the creator of the whole mankind), had extremely stern views towards women and vehemently criticized them saying that women are like the blood thirsty parasites who drain men's wealth, strength and ultimately spoil their dreams (Manusmriti). They lure men by their seductive appearance and lead them towards a black hole. Even in the 21st century, this evil practice flickers in some societies. Over the past few decades thousands of teenage girls became the victims of this evil. Before the introduction of the Universal Educational program (Sarba Shiksha abhiyan) of the Indian government, such harsh notions were common among uncivilized parents. This policy was launched by Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1924-2018), the former prime minister of India (1998-2004 ll-term) and the central objective of this program is to provide free and compulsory education (a fundamental right under 86th amendment) to children between 6-14 years of age irrespective of their gender, race and social status. This

programme encouraged and provided a chance to the downtrodden girl children to reach the height of dignity which they should have attained much earlier.

Religion

The region is home to diverse religions, cultures and traditions. The people are devotees of different faiths. There are as many as three widely followed creeds such as Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. People believe in polytheism and worship many deities. They call their deities in their local tongue "Sānnum". They traditionally have been worshiping nature, which is called animism, in the form of a stone, tree and also make imaginative figures of different shapes, made of white mud, whom they worship offering the first crops of the annual harvest in a small bowl. They also dripped the blood of the sacrificed animal on the mud-made figurines, because they believe that the deities and the demons are very thirsty. So in order to quench the thirstiness of their deities, they practice animal sacrifices. They practice it to keep all unfortunate elements away from their family.

In some other cases, we can also encounter the sacrifice of a rooster, the male chicken, during festival occasions. They cut off the head of the rooster and dripped its blood on the mud-made figurines of deities and malicious figures. The animal which they sacrifice is typically a goat or a rooster or sometimes even a pig.

They also celebrate many festivals throughout the year. Each festival is dedicated to a god or goddess; but the most extensively celebrated festival being Dusahara, the Festival of Victory over Demons. The principal essence of this festival is that no matter how powerful the wrong is, the right always prevails over the wrong. All individuals have their own cherished divinity. And in order to please their beloved deities, they practice animal sacrifices on festival occasions. I am of the opinion that humans are the real beast or flesh eaters on Earth; they swallow everything around them. "Never have I seen such a cruel, stern and brutal act of humans towards a mute or voiceless creature". Although I am also one of them, I am against all these inhuman and evil treatments towards innocent animals whom they slaughter to calm their own appetite. I am hopeful that one day the Indian Government will pass laws, sooner or later, to eradicate such evils altogether from our society. Another major religion is Christianity which received a great majority in the land. Technically the people, following it, are not Christians in origin. They have adopted it (Christianity) for some reasons in the past.

Alongside Hinduism and Christianity, another prominent creed is Islam. Mahammadans are a minority in the realm in comparison to the other two.

Tantricism

They believe in tantricism also which still exists in some rural areas where people are utterly ignorant, uncivilized and yet undeveloped. They still believe in some kind of supernatural forces and magics. Sometimes people even use it as a remedy for any sort of physical impairment. A person who practices this cult has to please the terrible-looking goddess Kali, the goddess of Tantra and the concert of Rudra (another nomenclatures for lord Shiva). They believe that if a person worships the goddess enchanting a special kind of hymn, specially created for the goddess, she shall give the devotee a boon which could make him more powerful than anyone else around him. Even in the 21st century, people's minds are overshadowed by these dogmas and delusions, which they accept as truth- although they are nothing but myths. Therefore, I call this place **"The realm of Dogmas"** or 'the land of unrealities', because its people hold stubborn beliefs in the supernatural.

Tourist Interests

The region has a substantial number of tourist attractions where people can visit with their family and enjoy the spectacular scenery of these landscapes. However, the main concerns regarding the locations include the risk of robbery, the fear of being hunted by any wild beast, and the precarious condition of roads. Another likely reason these tourist spots have seen a sharp decline in visitor numbers over the past few years is due to inadequate amenities, as well as the fact that many sites are located either at forested areas or somewhere where connectivity is still non-existent. In the succeeding subheadings, some well-known tourist destinations of the region are described in brief.

Majesty of Mount Mahendra

One of the renowned hill stations located in the Gajapati district is Mount Mahendra, which the natives call in their local tongue "Mahendragiri". The mountain is situated in the Eastern Ghat which was ruled by the Sailodbhabas in antiquity; The region was known as 'Kangoda Mandala' over which they ruled. The mountain is situated at an elevation of about 1501 meters above sea level, making it the second highest mountain peak in Orissa after Deomali, which sits at an altitude of approximately 16,72 metres (5,486 feet) above sea level. Apart from the splendor of its

biodiversity, it also has some architectural specimens made of stone standing in a dilapidated condition. Oriya Mahabharata- which was composed by Sarala Dasa upon whom we often bestow the title "Adikabi" or the first poet for his voluminous work, Oriya Mahabharata. He composed it in the 15th century, using a unique metrical style known as Dandi Vritha, under the patronage of a famous monarch of the Gajapati dynasty named Kapilendra Deva- claims that (yet to add details)

Legends claim that the stone specimens on the mountain were constructed by the Pandavas brothers during their exile (Vananasa). Although some misinterpretations claim it as truth, I am not convinced with them.

The serenity of this place attracts tourists. In Winter, a vast number of people visit the site from across the district and even from beyond to take a gleam of this ecological paradise. People can enjoy the breath-taking twilight moment from the sumit of this majestic mountain (Mount Mahendra).

Figure lV

Panoramic view of the sumit of Mount Mahendra

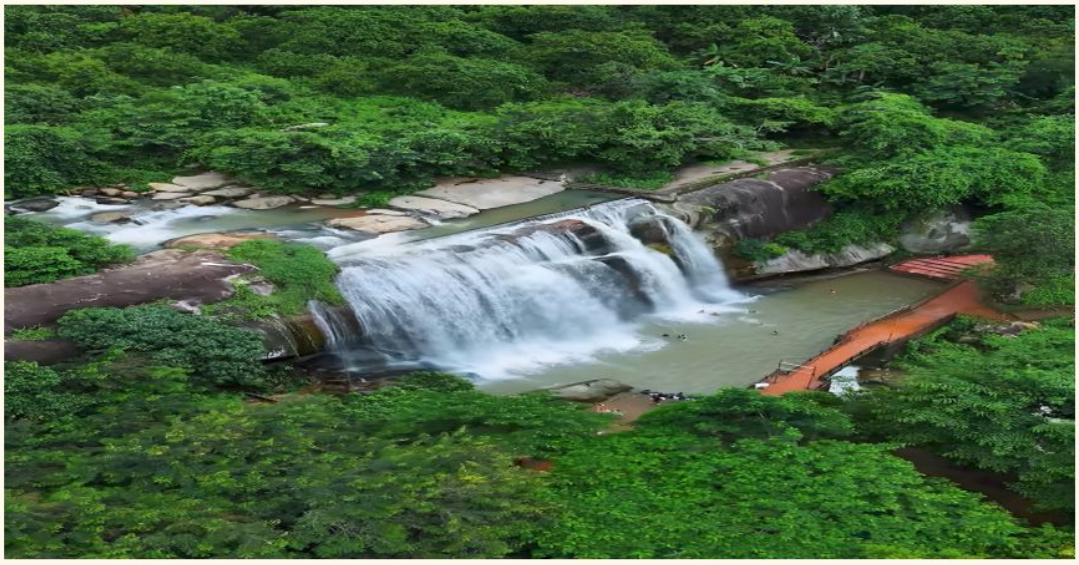
Gandahati Waterfall

Another hidden gem of nature located in the Gajapati district is Gandahati Waterfall. It is located at a distance of approximately 30 km from Paralakhemundi, the sub-division of the district, and 153 km from Berhampur town. It is enveloped by the verdant vegetation, spreading across the region. Every day people visit here in substantial numbers to experience the hypnotizing beauty of this natural gem. One of the fun things that people often do here is bathing in its cold, greenish water. The water falls from a great height and splashes down on the rocky surface. The waterfall is

located in a rural forested area near the river Mahendratanaya. It is obvious from its name that this place is often visited by wild animals. Wild elephants can be noticed here. The best time to visit the place is between October to February; During this time the weather is mild and comfortable. It is approachable by road. This place is one of the best options for those who love being in nature. Since it is only 30 km from Paralakhemundi railway station, one can even reach the site by train and then he or she can take a cab to reach the spot. Following are some of the images of this site.

Figure V

Gandahati waterfall near Paralakhemundi, Gajapati, Orissa



F- Vl

Aerial view of the landscape

F-Vll The image depicts the front view of the WF and the arched bridge

F-Vll

Padmasambhava Mahavihara

This Buddhist Monastery situated in a place namely Geerango near Chandragiri in the Gajapati district is a well-known tourist destination in southern Orissa. People from all parts of the district and even from other corners of the state visit every day to see it. In this place, a vast number of migrated Tibetan folk have been living ever since they were expelled from their homeland during colonial India. This is a major Buddhist centre renowned for its architectural splendor. This temple was named after a celebrated guru named Padmasambhava or (Guru Rinpoche) who is believed to be one of the founding fathers of Tibetan Buddhism. He appeared in Tibet in the 7th century A.D. and lived there for 54 years preaching Buddhism; the temple was named after this primitive figure. It was inaugurated by the 14th Dalai Lama in January, 2010. Inside the temple, a colossal bronze statue of lord Buddha is enshrined and It is accompanied by impressive idols of Guru Padmasambhava ranging a height of 17 or 19 feet and Abalokitesvara.

This Monastery is believed to be the largest situated in the eastern edge of the subcontinent. Since it is located only 91.1 km from Berhampur town, a tourist can reach here either by regular buses or can take a cab. If a tourist visits this place, he can also

see the famous Khasada Waterfall located nearby. Following are some of the physical pictures of this monastery and the waterfall.

F-Vll, Padmasambhava Mahavihara in Jeerango or Jiranga near Chandraguri, Gajapati

F-Vlll, The titanic statue of lord Buddha made of bronze

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F-lX Khasada Waterfall located in Jeerango near Chandragiri, Gajapati, Orissa

Weather

The weather condition of the region mostly remains benign, but sometimes it gets rather worse and causes serious damage to the life and property of the inhabitants. The land receives ample rainfall which helps farmers a lot undertake agricultural operations. During monsoon season, the depressed zones deluge with swampy water. Crop fields situated in these areas are often inundated by the rain water, draining from sloping areas. My home town, Ramagiri, is infamous for its extreme weather, especially in winter; Sometimes it exceeds the freezing point. Therefore, people can often be seen sitting around fire in the morning to shield themselves from the strikes of the breeze monster. I call my hometown, Ramagiri, “The Throne of Winter ”. I have characterized it thus, because the weather is far more severe here in Winter than anywhere else. The marshy areas are very suitable for growing crops. Since these lands always remain waterlogged, they (cultivators) will not have to channelize water from somewhere else for irrigation.

M. Sidharth

Seasons

As we know, seasons are ever-changing, vague and can vary in arrival from region to region. There are six recognised seasons- Summer, Rain, Autumn, Pre-winter (Hemanta), Winter and Spring, but we can experience only the following four- (1) Summer, (2) Winter, (3) Rain and (4) Spring- here and elsewhere. In my words, "The Summer is scorchingly hot, the Winter is extremely cold, the Rain is quite erratic, and the Spring is super aesthetic in my homeland. Spring is the season of resurrection for trees. They, trees, shed their littered (dead) leaves in Autumn, which is called "enescence", and assume younger ones in Spring; In this season, mother Nature wears her greenish skirt and the blooms of Delonix regia, Krushnachula, appear like she is crowned with it. The fragrance of blooms echoes across the region. All these natural phenomena are invaluable gifts from nature.

Cultural Assets

The land possess a rich cultural heritage. People still retain the cultures and traditions which they have inherited from their forefathers.

Dance and music

The people are fond of dancing to music played on instruments during festivities. They sing their tribal songs and dance to the rhythms. During the annual festival, all villagers assemble at a place where they dance and celebrate the festival with everyone. The musical instruments which the people most commonly play include Dhol- a barrel-like instrument made of wood and on the top of which is wrapped with a piece of leather that helps produce a deep dum-dum beat- Thabla, flute, drum. Besides these they also play a special kind of instrument made of bamboo with over twenty rows from the bottom to the top. One of the unique aspects of their dance is the repeated back and forth moments holding one another's waist.

Language

All creatures on Earth have their own unique way of communication. With the help of which, they can interact with others. Humans are blessed with this characteristic. As such they can speak several languages. Humans are the only creatures created by the

almighty who possess such ability. People of the land are mostly polyglot as elsewhere and speak at least two languages. Languages vary from region to region in dialect and style of speaking. One language can have several accents, for instance my mother tongue, Saura, has many branches spoken at different places with different dialects.

A place namely R. Udayagiri, one of the tahasils of the district, situated at a distance of 23 km from Ramagiri where people speak a different accent of the language called Lanjia Saura; it has its own unique test and beauty. The number of tribal languages spoken in the district is not definitely known.

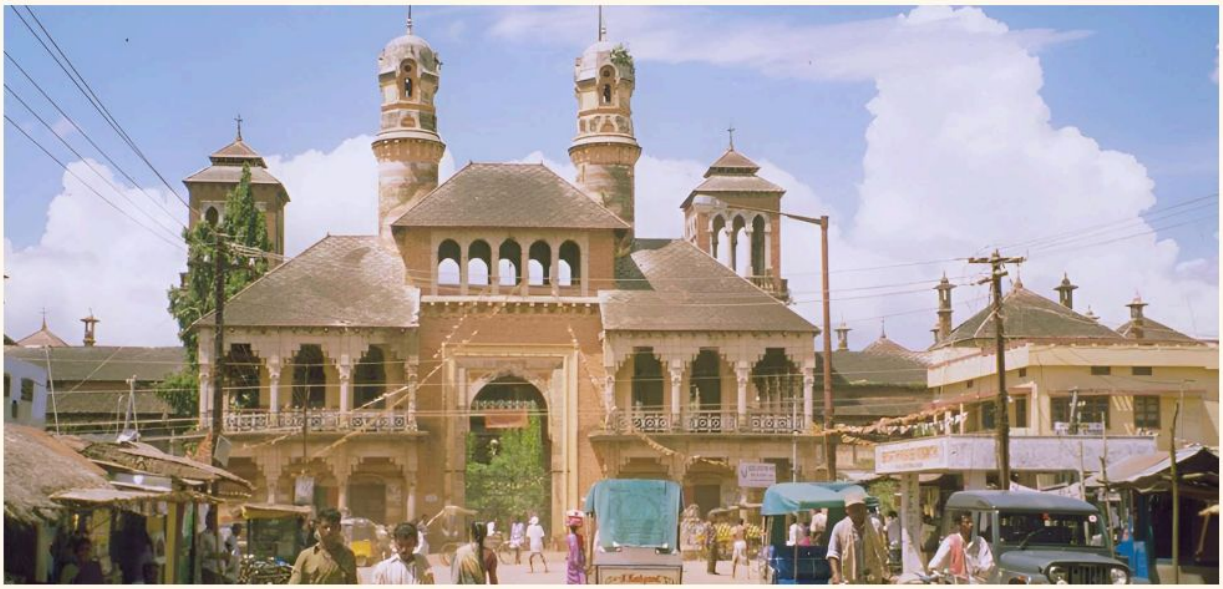
Food and Beverage

The people maintain a standard diet and consume healthy and nutritious foods, including green vegetables and dairy products. Although rice is a staple food in the region, they eat many other edible foods. They also consume animal products and are also fond of drinking beverages. They drink a traditional alcoholic beverage produced through distillation, which they call in their native tongue Hàlli. It is a locally made wine derived from the flowers of the butter tree (Madhuca longifolia), which is commonly known as Mahula tree or honey tree, and even from the fermented mangoes and Lemons. It has been produced for generations and is used to make an intoxicating drink. This addictive drink is harmful to health and can cost people dearly. Another drink with similar characteristics is the sap, the natural liquid that flows inside plants or trees, of the Indian Palm Date. Both elderly and the younger generation enjoy drinking this beverage. During the Vedic Age, people used to drink a ritual drink called 'Somras', which they offered even to the gods. Similarly, the Greeks who have been fond of drinking wine, made from grapes, since ancient times.

Architectural specimens

The district has some impressive architectural gems which are renowned across Orissa for their architectural designs and historical significance. Among them, the stone temples on Mount Mahendra are the most ancient and associate themselves with the figures of the Mahabharata war. These are believed to have been built by the ancient Pallavas. A famous temple namely Gokanesvara, which is dedicated to lord Shiva, is situated on this mountain. Apart from temples, there are some magnificent palaces in the metropolitan area. The royal palace of Paralakhemuni, serving as the residence of the royal figures, was designed by an English architect Robert Fellows Chisholm. The

construction began in 1835 and completed in 1843. This palace is a blend of lndo-Seracenic, Byzantine and European style, featuring intricate carvings, arched entrances and an underground passage for emergency situations. It is a three story building, serving as the residence of the Gajapati Monarchs. Another such specimen is the Brindavan palace located at a distance roughly 1.5 km-4 km, serving as the Summer residence of the Raja constructed on the bank of the river Mahendratanaya. I did not know until 2025 that there was another palace standing on the bank of the river Mahendratanaya except the one situated in mainland Paralakhemundi. I described my first impression on this palace in the following words: "The radiant bright complexion of this specimen struck my iris when I stared at it, and its colossal pillars in a row seemed to me like vertebral column, propping the long corridor of this grand palace." Following are the images of the above mentioned architectural gems.



F-X

Palace of Gajapatis in Mainland Paralakhemundi, Gajapati, Orissa

A surviving replica of the Byzantine style of architecture

F-Xl Brundavan palace on the bank of the river Mahendratanaya

F-Xll Front view of the Brindavan palace near Paralakhemundi, Gajapati, Orissa

Natural Disaster

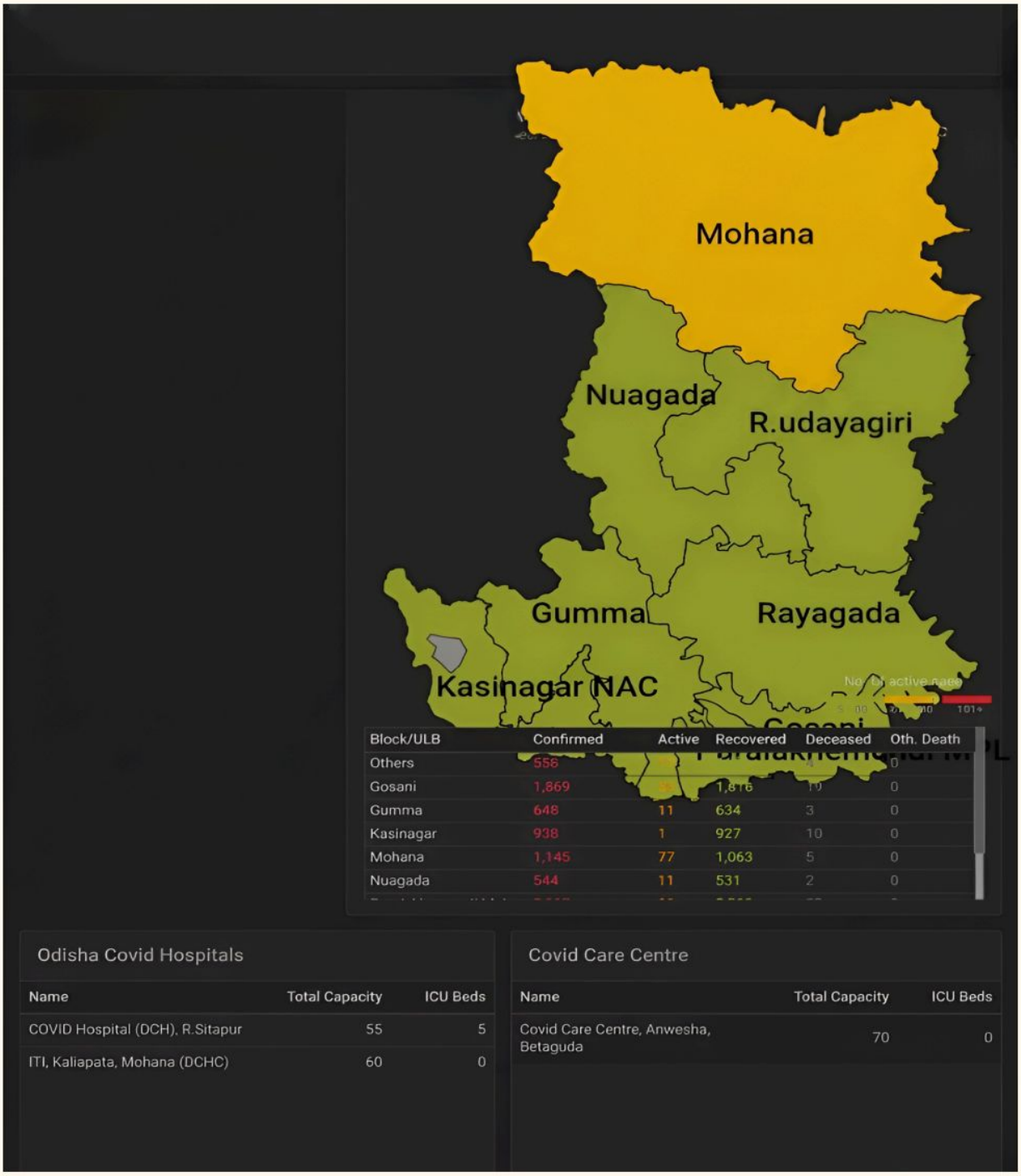
The district is vulnerable to natural calamities. Since it is one of the easternmost zones bordering the Bay of Bengal (ancient Kalinga Sagara), natural disasters hit the region several times in the past. But the most destructive wind storm that the region had ever experienced since the 1999 cyclic storm was the 2018 wind storm, (Titili),

coupled with a heavy downpour which completely altered the geography of the region and the entire area was submerged in rain water. People living in isolated areas were worst affected by the storm. Gajapati and Ganjam districts of Orissa were the first victims of the merciless storm. It caused unfathomable annihilation throughout the region leaving countless numbers of humans and beasts dead within a few hours of its landfall. It made its landfall on October 8, 2018 and dissipated after three days of unstoppable destruction. Trees fell, homes collapsed and the mountains looked like a bald man. It echoed the 1999 oceanic gale, inflicting devastation of a magnitude not witnessed since 1999. The death tolls of the region exceeded other affected zones. The estimated record of deaths caused by cyclone Titili is 89 in India and four people from Bangladesh due to landslides, wall collapse and flood. Although the devastation left many people panicked and hopeless, it turned out to be a boon later to them. People who previously lived in brick houses now live in pakha houses. It became possible because of the storm. Therefore, in order to honour nature for her gifts, I address her in the following words " The Storm that Changed their Destiny."

Carnage of COVID-19

After two months of recovery from the horrors of the storm, another great danger befell upon them in the following year (2019). The global pandemic Corona Virus entered India and devoured the entire nation in a few days. The main epicenter of this life-threatening biological pollutant is Wuhan, a city in mainland China from where it spilled over to other cities and then the whole world. Millions of people became its victim in just a few months of its outbreak. Governments erected quarantines and secluded shelters for the infected people. During these tense hours, people had to live apart from their family members. Countries declared nationwide lockdowns to prevent further transmission. India fought bravely against this invincible, cell-eater microscopic-being by taking early steps. W.H.O. declared it a global pandemic and scientists of all countries tirelessly worked to develop a vaccine to stop the rampant carnage of COVID-19. People had to maintain social distance and wear masks on their face for safety. The first cases of COVID-19 was reported in India from three towns of Kerala on 30 January, 2020, among three medical students who had returned from Wuhan, the epicenter of the pandemic. Describing the horrors of COVID-19, I remarked thus"The world turned into a vast cemetery, and inside it, people seemed to wither in silence- as though the air itself was counting down to an apocalypse." (yet to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the district).

M. Sidharth


Mohana
Nuagada
R.udayagiri
Gumma
Rayagada
Kasinagar NAC
Block/ULB Confirmed Active Recovered Deceased Oth. Death
Others 558 0
Gosani 1,869 1,816 10 0
Gumma 648 11 634 3 0
Kasinagar 938 1 927 10 0
Mohana 1,145 77 1,063 5 0
Nuagada 544 11 531 2 0
Odisha Covid Hospitals
Name Total Capacity ICU Beds
COVID Hospital (DCH), R.Sitapur 55 5
ITI, Kaliapata, Mohana (DCHC) 60 0
Covid Care Centre
Name Total Capacity ICU Beds
Covid Care Centre, Anwesha, Betaguda 70 0

F-lll The dashboard above shows the block-wise records of COVID-19 confirmed and active cases, recoveries and deaths.

M. Sidharth

Impact of Pandemic on District

The pandemic had a grave impact on the region, resulting in a high number of deaths, particularly among people with compromised immunity. The elderly were disproportionately affected by this airborne infection. Hospitals experienced an acute shortage of beds, oxygen cylinders, and the fires in graveyards seemed never to go out. (Yet to discuss the impact of Pandemic on the district)